

Here's a Tip

There's a hand-written sign taped to a large plastic jar next to the cash register in my favorite sandwich shop. It reads, "Tipping is not a place in China." Who knew? I guess that's an okay way of saying: "Don't be a cheapskate. Drop your change here." On the other hand, it's a bit gauche since tipping is usually handled in a subtle, if not down right polite, fashion. Take for instance, the valet who brings your car around. You fold up a few bills and discretely slip them to him as you slide onto the driver's seat and under the steering wheel of your car. He knows you are giving him a tip; he's expecting it. So why the secrecy? I don't know. It's just the way we do things in our culture.

What is tipping all about anyway? Legend has it that TIPS originally meant To Insure Prompt Service. Although a common practice in England, tipping did not become popular in America until the late 19th century. Things have changed. Tipping is now an inescapable part of life and it's more of an expression of gratitude for service given. However, knowing when and how much gratuity you should give someone can be perplexing. It is a combination of personal preference and societal pressure. Nonetheless, deciding how much to tip a server at your favorite down-home diner versus that charming waiter and the tuxedoed maitre d' at a five star, fine dining establishment doesn't have to put your brain into a tailspin. There are some fairly standardized guidelines you can follow.

- Tip servers 15% (casual establishment) to 20% (fine dining) of the

total bill, i.e. pre-tax or pre-discounted amount. NOTE: If the service was "over the top", feel free to add more; however, unless the service was absolutely horrible, do not cut back on the server's tip. Remember, the server is NOT responsible if the food is distasteful to you. In other words, don't penalize the server; he or she is just the messenger. Tips are an integral part of your server (or bartender's) earnings; they are not 'bonuses'.

- Airline travelers should tip airport baggage handlers \$1 per bag (if they ever want to see their bags again). Wheelchair transporters should get \$3-5 or more.
- Typical tipping for beauty services (hair salons and massages) range from 15-20%. Don't forget to provide additional tips for specialized services from shampoo and nail technicians.



- Parking garage attendants who valet park your car should get around \$5 for retrieving your car plus \$1 for each shopping bag or piece of luggage.
- Tow truck drivers deserve tips for helping, too, like \$3-5 to jump-start your car or \$5-10 for unlocking your doors.

In America (and most other countries), everyone seems to have their hands out for a tip. It's even more obvious when you go on vacation. From the Black Jack and Craps dealers at the casinos in Las Vegas to your room attendant, waiter, bus boy, maitre d', wine steward and massage therapist on any cruise ship, tipping is inevitable. To find out more about where, when and how much you should be tipping, search the Internet. One of the easiest sites to navigate (and a key source for this article) is Tipping.org.